



Lion Mountain



CITY OF CAPE TOWN | ISIXEKO SASEKAPA | STAD KAAPSTAD

THIS CITY WORKS FOR YOU



The Cape by Mons. Bourset c.1770. Note the signal flags in evidence on both Lion's Head and Lion's Rump/Signal Hill.

Signal Hill

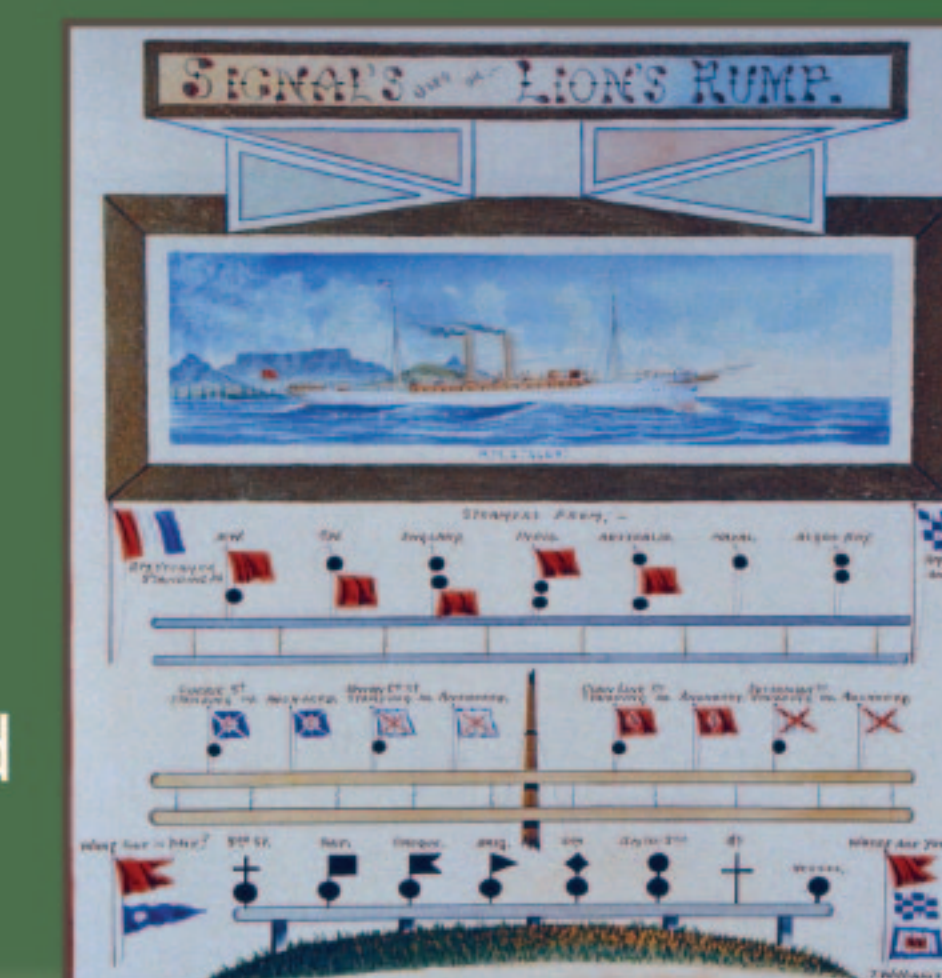
With the Second British Occupation of the Cape in 1806, the upper signal post on Lion's Head was abandoned in favour of using the one on Lion's Rump only. With the start of a regular mail service between England and the Cape in 1815 the need arose to upgrade this station and introduce shore-to-ship communications employing the 'Code of Signals' for merchant vessels which was adapted by Captain F. Marryat.

In 1855 the Royal Astronomer, Sir Thomas Maclear, arranged for a 'time ball' - by which mariners were able to set their timepieces and which was originally placed at the Royal Observatory near Varschedrift - to be moved to the signal station on Lion's Rump, 'so as to command the whole sweep of the bay'.



With the introduction of telegraph lines in 1861 to what was by now becoming ever more widely known as 'Signal Hill', it became possible to electronically trigger the drop of the time ball and attendant firing of the signal cannon from the Observatory.

Increasingly this service came to be seen as essential to the commerce and security of Cape Town and in 1894 the signal station was enlarged and then further improved upon in 1909. This facility remained in operation until 1950 when advances in modern radio communication rendered it obsolete.



Signals flown from Lion's Rump by T. Williams
Courtesy: Iziko Museums of Cape Town

Early callers made mention of a mountain at the Cape that resembled a crouching lion, lying sphinx-like before iconic Table Mountain. In time, various parts of this 'Lion' mountain took on more specific names such as *Leeuwenkop* (Lion's Head), *rug* (Back), *bil* (Rump) while other features came to be known as the *Leeuwenknie* (Knee) and *stert* (Tail).

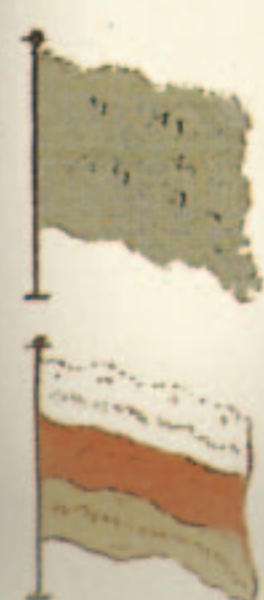
The strategic value of this high ground was recognised as early as 1660 when Commander Jan van Riebeeck based a lookout at today's Kloof Nek with orders to alert the settlement of arriving ships. In 1673 this lookout system was improved upon by Governor Isbrand Goske, who instructed that two bronze signal cannons be placed on Lion's Head itself (430 metres higher) and that a ship's mast be erected here to serve as a flagpole. These were intended to not only warn of the approach of possible enemies but also inform arriving Company ships, via a secret signal code, that all was in order at the Cape.

In time this signalling system was extended to include stations on Lion's Rump and Robben Island.

'A panorama of Cape Town and surrounding scenery' by Thomas Bowler (1852) displaying at the same time the view to the northwest afforded the signalmen stationed at what came to be known as *Vlaggemanskloof* (Flagman or Signalman's Kloof) and more recently as Kloof Nek.

Courtesy: Iziko Museums of Cape Town

Signal flags employed by the Dutch East India Company at the Cape (c.1790)



Courtesy: Western Cape Archives and Records Service BO180,19

